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## ABSTRACT

Career counselors at colleges and universities are encountering an increasingly diverse student population. It has been suggested that the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and the updated MMPI-2 can help career counselors as they try to help students deal with a wide range of individual needs and capabilities for coping with life stress. The reasoning behind using the MMPI and the MMPI-2 in career counseling is two-fold. The instruments can help counselors in making appropriate career counseling interventions and may also provide a reliable source of personal knowledge for students to utilize in their career decisions. Several investigations with the MMPI and career counseling found the instrument helpful in identifying individuals who are able to use a self-directed pattern when it comes to career assistance. The MMPI was also helpful in identifying individuals who may need more intensive help in their decision making process. Although few studies have directly investigated the usefulness of the MMPI-2 in career counseling, research on the consistency between the MMPI-2 and the MMPI leaves researchers optimistic that the newer test will also serve as a valuable tool in career decisions. Future research on the MMPI-2 should reveal more information about its value in career counseling. Contains 14 references. (RJM)

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Using the MMPI-2 in Career Advising: Exploring Implications  
for Usefulness in Personal Adjustment

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### Abstract

Career counselors, like all collegiate professionals, are increasingly coming into contact with a more diverse student population. This population typically represents a broad range of psychological functioning levels requiring career counselors to effectively deal with a wide range of individual needs and capabilities for coping with life (and occupational) stress. It has been suggested that the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), and the updated MMPI-2, can assist career counselors in helping students reach satisfying career choices. Continued research on the efficacy of the MMPI-2 in career counseling is needed and recommendations for its use in this area are discussed.

### Introduction

The perception that career counselors are working with greater numbers of students who have significant concerns in addition to those solely career-oriented is increasingly being recognized (Peterson & Clark, 1990). For this reason, some (Butcher, Graham, Dahlstrom, & Bowman, 1990; Zunker, 1994) have suggested that career counselors as a whole need to be better equipped to handle issues relevant to personal and/or social adjustment if they are to best serve today's diverse college population.

The first step in fulfilling this role for the career counselor comes in the initial encounter with the student. Peterson and Clark (1990) recommend that from the onset of working with any student, the career counselor should address the following general points:

To what degree is this person's career concerns related to other issues pertaining to personal or social adjustment?

What is this person's general level of anxiety? Subsequently, to what degree may the higher order thought processes required to make sound career decisions be impacted?

Is this person's level of cognitive and emotional disturbance at a point which would likely invalidate the results gathered from routine career interest or ability measures?

Is this person's current level of personal or social adjustment, or maladjustment, such that psychological remediation is warranted prior to any career-oriented work being undertaken? (p. 297).

Peterson and Clark (1990) go on to point out that in the usual course of events, and unlike their more "clinical" counterparts, career counselors typically have only a person's self-reporting and their own powers of observation to rely upon in making any judgment about psychological functioning. They point out that career counselors are in need of a more objective basis upon which to make an accurate assessment of a person's psychological functioning. As we know, the most reliable means to gathering an

accurate assessment of someone is derived through a combination of empirical instruments taken in context with other relevant individual information (Sundberg, 1977). Through such instruments, any judgments that might be made have yet one more source of data to consider.

The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) has a history of more than 50 years of clinical and empirical research. The updated MMPI-2 (since 1989) with an ever growing research base, was carefully designed so that the vast majority of existing MMPI research would be relevant (Graham, 1993). The MMPI, and now the MMPI-2, are without doubt the most widely used and researched instruments of their kind (Butcher, Graham, Dahlstrom, & Bowman, 1990; Graham, 1993).

The intent of this article is to explore how the MMPI-2 may be of benefit to university career counselors who use this instrument with other sources of information to provide a reliable assessment of a person's (in this case a college student's) personal and social adjustment in assisting them in the career decision-making process.

#### MMPI, MMPI-2 and Occupations Research

MMPI-2 designers were pleased to find that the initial research seems to reveal a remarkable consistency with the original MMPI in many respects (Graham, 1993). For instance the MMPI-2, like the original MMPI has been seen as a valuable preliminary indicator in applied occupational settings for two reasons. The first being prediction of occupational success. The second is the relationship between personality factors, as measured by the MMPI-2, and occupational interests, primarily derived from commonly used interest inventories.

#### Job Search Performance

The original MMPI has an extensive research history in many areas of personnel selection (Butcher, 1979). Peterson and Clark (1990) contend that the use of the MMPI-2 is likely to produce similar results.

The instrument has typically been used for one of three purposes (Avery, Mussio, & Payne, 1972). The first purpose uses the test as a predictor of job performance over a wide number of occupations. Another use of the instrument has been to "screen out" potential job applicants who the test indicates may be suffering from severe psychological problems. Lastly, the instrument has been utilized in helping to provide a "profile" of job applicants in comparing them to a "prototypical applicant profile". Doing so, the MMPI is used under the assumption that similar occupations attract similar personality types. It is assumed that, all other things being equal, the closer the match between the occupation and personality factors, the greater the likelihood of long-term job success and satisfaction (Peterson & Clark, 1990).

#### Occupational Interests Research

One of the reasons for the extensive use of the MMPI, and the continued interest in the MMPI-2 in terms of personal selection is that specific elevations on the instruments scales are associated with restricted ranges of interest and may also indicate individual capability to deal with stress (Peterson & Clark, 1990; Sternberg, 1956). Significant research with the original MMPI (Duntzman & Bailey, 1967; Zager, Arbit, Falconer, & Friedland, 1983) found that the test was useful in helping to predict global job performance as well as complementing information gathered from commonly used career interest and personality measures.

#### The MMPI-2 and Career Counseling

The reasoning behind employing the MMPI and now the MMPI-2 in career counseling process is two-fold. This instrument can be useful to career counselors in making appropriate career counseling interventions as well as for providing a reliable source of personal knowledge for the student to utilize in their career decisions (Peterson & Clark, 1990). The value of accurate self-knowledge is the most important realization in career decision-making (Isaacson & Brown, 1993; Sundberg, 1977).

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Several investigations done with the MMPI and career counseling (Loughead & Reardon, 1989; Peterson & Clark, 1990) found the instrument helpful in identifying individuals who are able to use a self-directed pattern when it comes to career assistance. Such individuals were found to usually be coping with normal levels of stress in a healthy manner. Likewise, it found that the instrument was useful on certain scales in identifying individuals who may need more intensive, or directed, help in their decision making process.

Duckworth and Duckworth (1986) and Green (1980) each working with the original MMPI, found that the F scale was a reliable way to question (when scores were > 70) whether the individual needed further clinical interventions before proceeding on with career counseling. Similar studies with the MMPI-2 should be conducted.

Peterson and Clark (1990) have asserted that the instrument (MMPI) is useful in career counseling because it uses a wide range of scales with which to make assessments in regard to contextual factors related to a person's career concerns.

The MMPI-2, like its predecessor, is thought to be useful for normal populations in that scores on certain scales may compliment scores on interest inventories, such as *Holland's Self Directed Search* (Loughead & Reardon, 1989). Finally, specific career-oriented studies need to be conducted to see if the MMPI-2, like the MMPI, proves useful in revealing information regarding a person's temperament (Dahlstrom, Welsh, & Dahlstrom, 1972; Green, 1980).

#### Implications and Recommendations

Looking at several career-relevant studies with the MMPI in conjunction with its extensive research history holds promise for the MMPI-2 to become a worthwhile tool for university career counselors. Furthermore, it has been pointed out (Loughead & Reardon, 1989) that the instrument can easily be presented to people, in this case

students, in a positive and constructive manner, allowing for further insight into career issues. It need not be interpreted in technical or overly psychological jargon.

It is however, important to point out the following about using this instrument in career counseling. At this time, very few studies have directly investigated the usefulness of the MMPI-2 in career counseling. Furthermore, despite its extensive research base, relatively few studies have been conducted with the original MMPI in looking at it's usefulness in career counseling, particularly with college students. Clearly this is an instrument that holds promise for helping broaden the scope of information used to make sound career choices and is in much need of research to best establish boundaries of usefulness in this area.

Further research should address not only the use of the MMPI-2 in career counseling, but in particular the circumstances that the test is most useful under and the qualifications of those employing it. It seems clear that if the MMPI-2 is ever to become a more "routine" tool at hand for career counselors, the vast majority of these professionals will require coursework, practicum, and internship experience to use the test. Also, those with only a master's degree will probably have to be supervised by a licensed psychologist or professional counselor (doctoral level) and maintain a commitment to periodical training to stay current with the instrument's research base.



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